

Water, wells and pumps

If you are going to grow vegetables, you will need a supply of water, especially during the summer months. Our understanding of water supply on the allotments is ever-changing as we learn more about our history through research.

To summarize:

1832 - There is a mention of a “water course” and there were two ponds on the east and a possible small pond in the dean gardens area near the Uxbridge road (a pond appears on maps occasionally)

1886-1903 - The committee comments on nine standpipes being laid on for plot holders in 1886

1906 - Ealing dean allotment protection association, which was set up in 1903 to stop the development of a school on the allotments, comment that there is water via stand pipes which have a key which only members of the association can use, not all plot holders. The association are paying the water bill from Metropolitan water board.

1920s -Unknown

1940s - Unknown

1976 – No mains water, individual plot holders digging wells for water. I was told in person by a former plot holder.

1980s - A small group of plot holders dig wells for water. There are currently around 10 known wells on Northfield allotments, five are in use.

1990 – Mains water supplied by Ealing Brentford consolidated charities (now called Pathways) An additional fee was charged to plot holders for the water

2024 – The same mains water supply is in use from the 1990s. The water is turned off during the winter and comes on from May to September.



The allotment pump project.

In 2014, Simon Coleman created a plan to instal hand pumps into existing wells on the Northfield allotments. Above image is the cast iron village pump in plot 161B that was installed in 2014.

The benefits of this scheme are:

- Give access to water all year round.
- Reduce the reliance on mains water and highlight the values of water conservation.
- Highlight the history and achievement of plot holders in the days before mains water.

The project was completed during 2014/15, and we now have four working hand pumps. We installed two semi-rotary pumps and two village upright pumps. We have found around five old pumps on the allotments, they all have been semi-rotary pumps, the kind of pump that can pump water, diesel and oil. It seems that some plot holders used a bucket and wire cable to get water out of the wells in the 1980s.

Semi-Rotary pumps

The semi-rotary pump has been used as far back as the 1750s. These pumps are still used today and have changed little in their design. They are commonly used in shipping and other marine activities. They can pump water, petrol, diesel and oil. We have found old pumps in the soil or in an old shed over the years. The image below left is an advert for Willcox pumps from around 1900, the image below right is a semi-rotary pump that was found on plot 224.



Mr R. W. Weal was the tenant of plot 229 from 1946 until 1993 when his son Dennis Weal took over the plot. A number of plot holders dug their own wells, as there was no mains water on the allotment until 1990. Mr R Weal dug the well on his plot, which is constructed of metal water tanks placed on top of each other with the bottom cut out. He also installed a Semi-Rotary pump to extract the water. His son Dennis took over the plot in 1994 and told Christina Fox that they constructed a shed around the pump to stop people using it as the handle became broken.

It has been remarked by long-standing plot holders that it was one of the "best kept plots" in its heyday. Dennis was in his 80s when he gave up his plot in 2014.

In 2014 the old semi rotary pump was found and reinstalled and the well as cleaned out. The pump, the broken handle and his shed have all been kept as a part of our history. Below are images of Mr. Weals shed and pump (with a new handle).



Two examples of well construction and improvements during the Pump project

Plot 161B

The plot holder had built a well lined with concrete, he had created a reservoir tank and an overflow shoot. We always find a lot of bath tubs and old metal water tanks on the allotment, this is because plot holders used them to store water. On plot 161B, the occupant had created a tank set up above ground something like a tank in the air, possible to create an irrigation system. He had used some basic metal items, one looked like a BBQ grill to cover part of the reservoir, during the project improvements we clearly wanted to make it the safe for plot holders so we purchased some church grates which were strong enough to stand on and built a wooden lid for the main well. We then fitted the pipework and installed the pump. See images below of the completed pump and set up (L), the well that was uncovered when work began (below Left and right)





Plot 213A

This well was constructed with metal barrels placed on top of each other. There was a lot of rubbish inside the well, including plastic pots wood, and a metal dustbin/incinerator. Once the rubbish was removed, the pipework was installed and a pump fitted. The images below show the completed pump below and below that, the rubbish removed from the well and an image of inside the well before cleaning out



